Title: Memories, Narration and the Nation: A Study of Select Works on *Muktijuddho*

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Synopsis

According to Benedict Anderson 'Nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time'. The idea of the nation pivots round an imaginative process. Nationalism is an ideology. It is actually a western phenomenon. South Asian nationalism is to a great extent, a derivative of the western model of nationalism. In the introduction of *The South Asian Nationalism: A Reader* Sayantan Dasgupta clearly explains the problems embedded in the replication of the western form of nationalism in South Asia, "The conflict between the notion of nationalism as empowerment and that of nationalism as an exercise of homogenisation or hegemonization is a significant feature of the South Asian nationalism. The former is evidently visible in the colonial era when the nationalist struggle is typically posited as a sacrosanct movement against the unjust and unequal system that fuels a drain of wealth from periphery to the imperial centre and impoverishment of the former". The practice of homogenization/hegemonization is embedded in the inclusionary and exclusionary politics of nationalism. The discourse of nationalism invents imagined communities that are identified as distinct communities as much by their internal resonances as by external differences. Intra-national exclusionary politics is also a potential reality in the South Asian nationhood. The contours of nationalism like language, religion, and ethnicity amalgamate people as much as they dissociate .West Pakistan tried to use language as a trope in order to homogenize and hegemonize East Pakistan. They have used similar policies of appropriation in Sindh. The imposition of Sinhala language with the subsequent relegation of Tamil is also evident in Sri Lanka. President Liaquat Ali Khan's 1948 speech bears traces of official nationalism propagated by West Pakistan.: 'It is necessary for a nation to have one language and that language can only be Urdu and no other language.' West Pakistan has also failed to address the discrepancies in the aspirations of the two spatially and culturally dissociated mass of lands, i.e, West Pakistan and East Pakistan.

Lack of geographical proximity between East and West Pakistan was also evident in the differences belying the linguistic and cultural practices. Because of such discrepancies West Pakistan could not rely on the religious allegiance alone as a token for unification. So, successive regimes in West Pakistan embarked on a forcible linguistic and cultural assimilation towards the Bengalis of East Pakistan. Over the years various West Pakistani linguistic, administrative, military, civil and economic controls which amounted to no less than a colonial oppression have led to the nine month long liberation war in 1971 culminating in the liberation of East Pakistan

and the creation of Bangladesh. In order to overpower the Bengali revolutionaries as well as the unarmed civilians West Pakistani military and their local collaborators, the *rajakars* took recourse to an orgy of murder, rape, arson and destruction perhaps unequalled in the annals of human civilization.

The 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh has been a watershed moment in the history of the nation. The literature written on this traumatic and cataclysmic event which has given birth to Bangladesh has evoked research works in various disciplines. However, there are a number of areas which have been left unexplored. In "Interpretations of the Bangladesh War" Ranabir Samaddar claims that, "In the year of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the nation, Bangladesh still does not have an authoritative and exhaustive history of the Liberation War". He also points out that the reason behind this lack might be the insufficiency of documents, the problem of classification of documents, and the problem of historiography. Sarmila Bose talks in the same vein in *Dead Reckonong: Memories of the 1971Bangladesh war*. According to her, "Yet, in spite of the passage of three decades, Bangladesh collectively failed to produce well-researched, documented and thoughtful histories of 1971 which might influence world opinion with any degree of credibility. The conflict of 1971, therefore, is in need of serious study in many aspects." In order to address this lacuna in historiography memory can become a potential trope to visit and revisit the past in a manner which is partial, subjective and local as compared to that of history which is claimed to be authoritarian, objective and universal. Authors of fictions try to visit and recreate the past using the trope of memory. My research work includes fictions written on *Muktijuddho* by two specific generations of authors. The first generation of authors include those who have lived the traumatic moments of the Bangladesh liberation war. They have the first-hand experience of the brutal events that resulted into the germination of the nation called Bangladesh. Their emotional attachment to these events makes their works more local compared to global. *Akhtaruzzaman Elias' Golpo Somogro* selected and edited by Koushik Guha and Tarun Payne, Elias's *Chilekothar Sepai*, Shaheedul Jahir's *Jibon O Rajnoytik Bastobota*, Shaheen Akhtar's *Search* will fall in this category. The second generation of authors do not have firsthand experience of *Muktijuddho*. Their memories are more constructed than those of the first generation of authors. Their temporal and spatial dissociation from the events of *Muktijuddho* gives them a sense of rational objectivity as compared to the emotional involvement, although this idea of rational objectivity is always contingent and open to contestation. Their temporal dissociation bring to the fore the idea of transferred memory. Spatial dissociation complicates the matter to the core because it situates them as diasporic authors. Here the global perspective of these authors comes in to play. Tahmina Anam's *A Golden Age* and *The Good Muslim*, Neamat Imam's *The Black Coat*, Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*, Yasmin Saikia's *Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh* and *Rising from the Ashes: Women's Narratives of 1971* edited by Shaheen Akhter, Suraiya Begum, Meghna Guhathakurta, Hameeda Hossain, and Sultana Kamal and translated by Niaz Zaman come under this category. In order to strengthen my standpoint in this research work counter voices from the imagined 'other' of Bangladesh, which is Pakistan will also be included into the work. Sarmila Bose's *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War* will be treated as a primary text which gives prominence to the voices from Pakistan. Parallel to her book I will read a few novels written by contemporary Pakistani authors such as Sorayya khan's *Noor* and Moni Mohsin's *The End of Innocence*. This will help me to trace and contextualise the contesting voices that are trying to narrate the nation of Bangladesh from various perspectives.

Bangladesh liberation war has multiple interesting facets which have evoked research works across disciplines including history, oral history, women studies, psychological studies especially studies in the field of trauma, and literary studies. Followings are some of the research works worth mentioning here; *Bangla O Bangalir Itihas* edited by Ajay Roy and Shamsuzzaman Khan, Garry.J.Bass's *The Blood Telegram: India's Secret War in East Pakistan* and Ananya Jahanara Kabir's*Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971and Modern South Asia,* William B.Milam's *Bangladesh and Pakistan: Flirting with Failure in South Asia*, Neluka Silva's *The Gendered Nation: Contemporary Writings from South Asia, A South Asian Nationalism Reader*, edited by Sayantan Dasgupta's , Maidul Islam's*Limits of Islam:Jamat-e-Islami in Contemporary India and Bangladesh*. Considering all the nuances of the subject involved, and the contemporary studies of the issues of partition and nation formation the scopes of interpreting and understanding the associative issues of memory, post-memory and constructive amnesia with all their existing ruptures within are still to be explored. Therefore, the proposed work of research has justifiable chances of taking forward its endeavour.

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